



Maricopa County

News Release

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Maricopa County Environmental Health Specialists Urge Public to Take Precautions to Prevent Hantavirus

PHOENIX (December 13, 2004) – The Maricopa County Environmental Services Department reminds the public that during the winter rainy season it is very important to take appropriate precautions in rodent infested areas to prevent Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS).

Since 1993, when hantavirus was first identified in the southwest, 39 cases of HPS have been reported in Arizona. Through September 1, 2004, a total of 379 cases of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome have been reported in the United States. Of these, 36 percent were fatal.

So far this year, the Arizona Department of Health Services has confirmed two HPS cases in Apache County. There have not been reports of HPS cases in Maricopa County since 2002, when three cases were confirmed.

HPS is an often deadly disease that usually begins with flu-like symptoms, and may rapidly progress to respiratory failure when the lungs fill with fluid. Patients usually develop breathing difficulty approximately two to six days after onset of symptoms. Hantavirus is spread by the deer mouse and other closely-related species of wild mice, which excrete the virus in their urine, droppings and saliva. People can become infected by inhaling particles of the virus that may become airborne when rodent droppings or nests are disturbed. The virus is not spread from person to person.

The disease was first recognized during a 1993 outbreak that occurred in the Four Corners area, affecting 53 people in Arizona, Utah, New Mexico and Colorado.

Hantavirus can occur wherever the deer mouse and its close relatives are present, which includes most rural areas throughout the county. Other rodents, such as roof rats, have not been shown to pose a threat of hantavirus. It is important to take preventive measures to avoid contracting the disease.

"Do not clean or disturb areas with recent rodent infestation until you have thoroughly disinfected the area," said Al Brown, Maricopa County Environmental Services Director. "Be especially cautious when entering a structure that has been closed up for a period of time."

People who have been exposed to rodent droppings and who become ill with HPS-like symptoms should seek medical care.

More valuable information on Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hanta/hps> or by calling the Arizona Department of Health Services Office for Vector Borne Diseases (602) 364-4562, or the Environmental Services Complaint Line at (602) 506-6616.

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Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome Q&A

What is hantavirus?

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is a disease that usually begins with flu-like symptoms, and may rapidly progress to respiratory failure when the lungs fill with fluid. Patients usually develop symptoms within a few days to six weeks; difficulty in breathing tends to occur approximately two to six days after onset of symptoms.

How do you get hantavirus?

Hantavirus is spread by the deer mouse and other closely-related species of wild mice, which excrete the virus in their urine, droppings and saliva. People can become infected by inhaling particles of the virus which may become airborne when rodent droppings or nests are disturbed. Anyone that is cleaning rodent nests or areas where rodents have been including homes, workplace, and especially cabins, garages and barns in rural areas should use precautions.

What is the incubation period?

It usually takes one to six weeks for incubation. This means that once a person is exposed to the virus, it can take from one to six weeks to develop the disease.

How common is hantavirus in Arizona?

Through December 1, 2004, there have been 39 cases of hantavirus in Arizona.

Is it fatal?

Hantavirus can be fatal. Thirty-six percent of all reported cases have resulted in death. Of the 39 cases that have been reported in Arizona since 1993, nine people have died.

Is it transmissible person-to-person?

No. A person is infected only by inhaling particles of the virus which may become airborne when rodent droppings or nests are disturbed.

Is this something to be worried about?

Hantavirus occurs wherever the deer mouse and closely related species are present which is generally in rural areas. The public is advised to avoid contact with rodents, their nests and droppings. Other rodents, such as roof rats, have not been shown to pose a threat of hantavirus.

What can I do to protect myself against hantavirus?

Proper clean-up methods:

– When rodent droppings or nests are found in and around the home, spray them liberally with a household disinfectant and allow them to soak for at least 15 minutes. Use disinfectants that kill viruses, such as Lysol®, or a solution of one-part household bleach mixed with nine parts water.

- After disinfecting, wear rubber gloves and clean up the droppings with disposable materials such as paper towels, rags or mops.
- Seal all materials, droppings or nests in double plastic bags and dispose of them in the trash.
- Do not clean the droppings or nests by sweeping, brushing or vacuuming, since these methods stir up dust and increase a person's chances of inhaling the virus.

Rodent-proof your home:

- Prevent rodents from entering the home by plugging or sealing all holes and gaps to the outside greater than 1/4-inch in diameter. Use steel wool, thick wire screen, metal flashing or cement to seal holes.
- Eliminate or reduce rodent shelter around the home by removing outdoor junk and clutter, and by moving woodpiles, lumber, hay bales etc., as far away from the house as possible.
- Keep the lawn trimmed and free of excess weeds and brush.
- Do not make food easily available to rodents. Do not leave pet food in dishes. Dispose of garbage in trash cans with tight-fitting lids.
- Wash dirty dishes promptly, and clean up spilled food immediately. Store bulk grains and animal feed in rodent-proof containers.

Rodent control:

- Control rodents inside the home by placing spring-loaded "snap" traps in areas where rodents and their droppings have been observed. Bait the traps with peanut butter and/or oats and check them regularly. When rodents are caught, spray the dead rodents with a disinfectant, such as Lysol® or bleach and water, then wait at least 15 minutes. Put on rubber gloves and then seal the dead rodents in plastic bags before disposing of them in a trash can. The snap traps can be disinfected and re-used.

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